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ABSTRACT

The "information explosion" has produced a confused state in society; we have both information deprivation and alienation in the midst of all of our technological advances. Many towns are finding that the predicted wonders of cable television have not materialized and that the average citizen is not interested. But information and knowledge centers are developing in many communities with the goal of providing interaction and information programs, mediating between various segments of the community, and supplying groups with knowledge of public issues. Growth of these centers should continue so long as the managers reject the myths that profits can be made from selling information, that hardware is the key, and that we already know what information is wanted and needed. It is recommended that: 1) a model for community planning be developed, 2) a national information number be established, 3) a national study be commended, 4) information reach the local communities so they may make better decisions, and 5) the public library be investigated for its proper role. (WH)

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INFORMATION EXPLOSION/DEPRIVATION

IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW TOWNS

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The previous chapter describes in some detail the technological possibilities and realities in information handling, particularly as they relate to cable television. This phenomenon, paralleling what we now with a degree of indifference term the "information explosion," represents a particular yet expected irony in this country. Despite the uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable knowledge explosion, and despite the mind-boggling possibilities as previously described in technology, there is increasing reason to believe that the general population is subjected to unrelenting forces that they not only do not understand, but, far more devastating, of which they are totally unaware. These forces, which we can generally attribute to information deprivation, seem to be products of our technocratic society where we are increasingly aware of mass alienation and aloneness.

We can attribute these circumstances to several factors. It is unsettling, mildly put, to accept the fact that in this country man's capacity for destruction has outstripped his capacity for learning. It is equally

disturbing to see and be unable to act upon the fact that there is an ever-widening gap between the haves and the have nots.

Services are available and citizens go without; knowledge doubles in less than a decade as science, industry, education, and government repeat their own research and all too often their own mistakes, in what someone has more accurately called a "galaxy of garbage."

One obviously assumes that available technology should serve to harness the explosion and remove the deprivation. The problem is not complex and it is not unusual. Everybody is talking, but not to each other. The communications experts are talking to themselves. The hardware people do not talk to the software people, and none dares communicate with the consumer.

An unvarying succession of interviews with new town developers and management staffs indicate that they have, with single minded purpose, gone through planning for information delivery considering only"the cable." Further they each have gone about it in the same way. First a planning group made up of technological wizards and futuristic dreamers have devised (on paper) "the plan." The catalogs of the many wonders have been ticked off until we can recite them from memory: typically, the

housewife does her shopping, has her account debited, and her week's groceries delivered to her electronic kitchen while sitting in bed drinking her morning tea or the businessman or salesman keeps totally on top of new developments without reading and does all his selling and even has his martini without leaving his living room. Enough said!

In the most promising new towns from Texas to Georgia to Virginia, from New York to Minnesota, the findings are the same. All things are possible but few things are probable. In each case there is a twenty million dollar plan for a wired city on somebody's shelf. The wizards and the dreamers are gone, replaced by a few exceptional "nuts and bolts" thinkers who may cause a few things to happen.

The story behind the inaction is also the same. "Joe Sixpack" (a name coined for the average citizen by my Task Force Chairman) isn't buying. He is information deprived. We know he is information deprived, but the problem is that he doesn't know it. Further, the market analysts find out very quickly that given the choice between a swimming pool and a golf course or a total

integrated information system there is just no contest at this time.

Meanwhile, back in Arcadia, what is actually happening is this: In Flowermound, Texas, an elaborate, original expensive plan of General Telephone and Electronics has been shelved. In its stead they will market with residential and commercial establishments connected to the cable and wait. With a slight amount of orchestration this pretty well sums up the situation in Shenandoah (Atlanta), Georgia; Cedar Riverside (Minneapolis), Minnesota; Park Forest South, Illinois; Welfare Island (New York), and Jonathan (Minneapolis), Minnesota where an organization called Community Information Services has a flashy exhibit with far more form than content raising far more questions than answers.

The activities of the new towns are relatively unknown to persons in positions dealing with people and their information needs. But then the reverse is true. Therein lies a set of problems and circumstances of which more will follow.

INFORMATION, IT'S MANIPULATION AND USE

Attempts to control, manipulate, and sometimes to make information available are emerging along with the institutions examined by this Task Force. Among the many interesting developments are the Citizens Information or Knowledge Centers, which, although in primitive form, are widespread. Such centers are developing and will continue to develop for several compelling reasons:

a) To afford individuals interaction and information programs for educational, career, social, and cultural development,

b) To mediate between people needing community services and counseling and the public or private agencies capable of answering these needs,

c) To provide groups with knowledge and means of analysis, dialogue, and planning regarding public issues.

Within the next decade such centers are likely to proliferate manyfold, and the potential is there for them to become far more sophisticated technologically, employing communications networks, computer terminal

facilities, and associated software and personnel services. This development may point to the most significant area for renewal, expansion, and growth of the information services of the public library. Conversely and more likely it may represent a new industry that will bypass the library and further stretch elements in which it needs desperately some victories, namely its viability and credibility as a service institution. With proper leadership this could become the most fundamental and far-reaching direction for the public library since the era of the immigrant and the great depression.

These information centers are extremely significant for several reasons:

1) They offer the means to allow citizens to assure that the kinds of information they want and need are being designed into the system;

2) They are being well publicized in their communities in a fashion similar to action lines for drug problems, etc.;

3) They are designed to assure that the person not only gets information but gets some positive responses to problems about which he seeks information.

Example: In Atlanta, Georgia expelled teenagers desirous of getting back in school were counseled by a Storefront Library--Information Center Director; communications with parents and school counselors were re-established; and the truants were re-enrolled in school. They came to the Center seeking employment;

4) The information-giving function is totally objective and not biased toward anyone other than the citizen posing the question.

A brief description of several of these emerging information programs follows:

1. An integrated information and referral system for Dade County Florida.

Auspices = Metropolitan Dade County Government

Organization = administrative control directly under County Manager

Cooperation = subcontracts with United Fund for I & R from UF Agencies

This is the most extensive and best organized of the various systems surveyed, and is well into operation with the following components:

- Information and Referral Systems

  An integrated information and referral system that provides centrally controlled referrals to public and private agencies.

- Transportation

  A system allowing isolated indigents to be moved to services.

- Crisis Intervention

  Operated as walk-in, phone-in service to County Hospital.

- Administration

  Comprehensive approach including a computer to determine the needs and means available by continuous monitoring and evaluation.

At present some 35,000 calls for information are accepted per month coming from migrant farm workers of South Dade, the downtown Cuban populations,

deprived blacks, and white inner-city residents and senior citizens.

Reaction of citizens is obviously the most telling statement of need. The program is completely independent of the public library operating with a central office and eleven neighborhood centers.

2. "Call for Action"

This information and referral program was designed and promoted by the National Urban Coalition, a group of business activists who work with community groups to bring about peaceable change in big cities.

Two components are necessary: a cadre of citizen volunteers to man the services, and an independent radio station to serve as a two-way linkage to the citizens. The most successful program presently is in New York City, where 50 young housewives work through Radio Station WMCA. Other projects are forming in Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Fresno, New Haven, Utica, San Antonio, and Altoona.

Instructions for starting a Call to Action Program are available from the Urban Coalition, Washington, D. C.

3. Contact Center of Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada

Auspices = Scenic City and Owen Sound Kiwanis Club

The program was launched to "put people in touch with the agencies or organizations best equipped to handle their questions."

Its connection with public libraries is only that its volunteer Director Bettie Armitage is a professional librarian. Public Libraries might well hear Bettie's philosophy, "We want to be there and to be used to allow people to solve their problems before they are virtually unsolvable."

4. Neighborhood Information Centers Project

Auspices = Public Libraries in Atlanta, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, and Queens, under joint funding of HEW Special Projects Grant and the local library system.

This project was funded with the specific objective to research, design, and implement

two Neighborhood Information Centers in two branch libraries in each of the five cities. Philosophically it is similar to all others herein described in that the Centers will attempt to deal in survival information and will attempt to help combat the sense of powerlessness that is prevalent in our large cities.

5. Citizens Urban Information Center Program of the Brooklyn Public Library

Auspices = Brooklyn Public Library with coordination of the Administration and Management Research Association, Inc., under contract with the City of New York.

Similar to number four above, it will, in the words of Mayor John Lindsey, "Provide important and easily accessible services to people in their own neighborhoods. The Center will be a clearyinghouse for all sorts of vital information. . . ." In particular the Centers will focus on problems in which agencies of government have a responsibility for providing services or assistance.

These efforts and others emerging around the country have a common thread that might best be summed up in the words of John Gardner as head of the Urban Coalition, "When I was in government I was struck by the need for some procedure that would enable people to place their grievances before those in authority and get prompt action. It (call for action) is an enormously constructive idea which can help all kinds of people cope with all kinds of problems."

Obviously these programs for citizen information are relatively insignificant in their present impact. The significant point to be made is that the resource files are being built in a makeshift fashion directly off questions that are actually posed by people. This represents a complete turn-around from plans described as characteristic of new towns. In many ways, it also represents a turnaround from usual efforts to design library information systems, because efforts to date have normally consisted of prepackaged reference services and networks with a great deal of thought being given to the "balance" of the resources. That balance is usually struck by librarians and systems personnel with little

knowledge and often little thought given to identifying what the critical information needs of the citizens of the area might be.

Thus we have begun to identify in precise and concrete fashion some of the information needs of people, and through new town planners and technologist and others, we have identified the technological possibilities of manipulation and transmittal of information.

NATIONAL CONCERNS - PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Control and sharing of information, particularly bibliographic information and information needed by government and private enterprise to operate efficiently, is becoming highly sophisticated through various information transfer techniques utilizing electrical signals commonly known as information networks.

The principal effort in this arena is the development of a computer utility that allows large classes of individual users to have access, more or less simultaneously to a great variety of services. Such services are based on the storage of extensive and varied data in centralized locations with ability to adapt for providing information services over wide geographical areas.

Many of the federal government operations such as internal revenue, social security, military logistics, and law enforcement now utilize skillfully developed computer-communications networks. They are increasingly comprehensive, powerful, and efficient. One needs only study the configuration and scope of the National Crime Information Center, where a growing file of criminal information relating to vehicles, guns, wanted persons, etc., is stored in a central computer with access through 64 terminals in 44 states, to see the real potential of national information networks.

In business similar examples are available, such as the SABRE System of American Airlines for reservations with 2,000 local terminals; the system of Household Finance Corporation with credit information fed into 1,000 branch offices; and the system utilized by the hotel industry, where the International Reservations Company is emerging as a world-wide reservations service.

In the education and library fields, the acceleration of knowledge is having profound impact. In both fields the technology is again outstripping possible applications as controversial computer-aided instructional

(CAI) programs such as the one in New York State, closed-circuit talk-back television teaching such as that used in the Florida extension program, and enormous outlays of funds going into "the totally automated library," such as in Florida Atlantic University, spring into being.

Close observation of all such efforts indicate that hardware capability and technological expertise are coupled with limited understanding of software needs and cost benefits.

Only in the area of bibliographic control (which to date may be classified as a housekeeping function) have there been significant breakthroughs. Programs such as the Ohio College Library Center Project, MARC II; MEDLARS; and the NASA Recon network have a real potential for shared resources, identification of research, and cost control in organization of resources. Particularly significant among such efforts is the NASA Recon System, in which interactive information language (DIALOG) is being used, which has special features to assist the user in the formation and modification of his requests. Uniquely among those mentioned, the purpose of the data transmission search capability is to assist the user in

his search for information. Even in these largely bibliographic control efforts, sharp criticism has been leveled at the disparity between the ambitious plans for the future and the meager results in the present. Since the benefits might best be described as intangible, such networks are also suffering a severe lack of financial support.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In surveying the activities and plans of emerging informational programs, one cannot help but be reminded of the character in a Disraeli novel who was "distinguished for his ignorance as he had but one idea and it was wrong." We cannot help but be alarmed as we view the dichotomy between what is being said and what is being done of, by and about new towns, cable television, and the whole spectrum of information handling and dissimilation.

Even the new town as a physical entity is being oversold. Although touted by government and certain urbanologists as a panacea for the ills besetting Urban America, it is now clear that in many respects they will be just another middleclass suburb. In fact most cannot avoid it as they have been deliberately located 35-50

miles from some great metropolitan center and designed to depend on the center for survival. A recent survey by the Urban Life Center of Georgia State University revealed that "less than four percent of the black population of Atlanta would even consider moving 30 miles out to a new town." This is particularly significant since a well-known black contractor is in the process of building a well-publicized new town (Shenandoah), which is 45 minutes from the city.

Therefore it seems that we must first recognize what we are dealing with in terms of a town and its people. We can then speculate that provided several myths can be dispelled it will be possible to make real progress. Some of the myths are:

1) That the new town can make profit from selling information to its citizens,
2) That hardware (cable and computer) hold the only key to the puzzle,
3) That we know what information is really needed.

New town developers and managers have, to date, not come to grips with even the most basic and rudimentary

systems of information. Nowhere did we find meaningful dialogue, for example, between the above and the public library officials who will most likely hold responsibility for providing library services to new town dwellers. We hasten to add that this is not altogether the fault of the new town manager as there appears to be little understanding and interest by the library community. In one case where very significant dialogue is in process between a new town (in town) and the local public school, the public library administration had declined an invitation to utilize the considerable talents and resources of the new town establishment to attempt to plan for public library services including citizen information. Clearly a critical communications problem exists among local, regional, and national individuals and organizations where attempts are being made to resolve problems in splendid isolation.

The following recommendations are made on the basis of several interviews, on site observations and research, covering new towns in several states, Citizens Information Centers in several states, and general knowledge of national efforts at bibliographic information control:

1. That a model be designed whereby a local library, a new town or new towns, a local school system, and possibly a community college be charged with developing a library-informational program that would take advantage of existing resources and existing technology to determine whether a totally new concept or concepts might be implemented for information delivery.

Conceivably this model could utilize national bibliographic data, local library resources, and cable-computer facilities of the new town to experiment and develop the project. We do not feel that the kind of resistance that has been evidenced by the people moving to new towns toward experimental public education would be a problem with the library. Where you cannot at this time sell the idea that the "city is the classroom," you might very well sell the idea that the library is wherever and in whatever format and delivery system that worked efficiently to connect the citizen with the needed information.

We are suggesting an experiment with backing similar to that committed to the Minnesota Experimental City Transportation plan.

2. That efforts be initiated to create a national (800 area code) toll free informational and referral center where citizens would be directed to local centers, such as those described in the section of this paper dealing with citizens information, and that this telephone number be advertised in the news media, on billboards, etc., with the same level of commitment that is evident in programs to combat crime and drug traffic. If we can spend billions of dollars to prevent an unwed mother from collecting welfare can we not spend a few million to give her the information she needs to deal with her problem?

[3]That a study, national in scope, be initiated to point out the tremendous advantages inherent in establishing citizens information centers in urban public libraries. Such obvious advantages as decentralization, neutrality, flexibility, and the fact that the library is already supported and designed to give information are obvious, and there are many more.

4. That a national alarm be sounded on the issuance of cable television franchises to local areas assuring that the proper questions, at the very least, are answered prior to granting such franchises. Several appropriate questions are posed by Baer in Cable Television, a 1973 Rand publication on local decision-making for informational systems:

1) What is being done now?
   - who provides the information or service?
   - who uses it?
   - how is it delivered to users?
   - is there feedback from users?
   - how much is spend on service delivery and feedback?
2) What are the present problems in providing the service?
3) How might cable television help? Would other media such as broadcast television, the telephone, or the mails be as effective?
4) Can the service be provided on the free education or government access channels?

5) Will it require other facilities or equipment?
   - additional channels?
   - private channels?
   - two-way response (data, audio, or video) from viewers?
   - viewer-to-viewer communications?

   How much will this cost?

6) Who will do the programming or provide the service? How much will it cost?

7) How will the target audience be identified and reached? How much will this cost?

8) What are the arrangements for audience feedback?
   - how will success or failure be measured?
   - how will feedback modify the way the service is provided?

   How much will it cost?

9) Overall, how will the service be paid for?
   - from existing local budgets, as a result of cost savings?
   - from additions to local budgets?

- from state or federal aid?
- from foundations or private gifts?
- by taxing cable subscribers?

10) Will a special showing to the FCC be necessary? Must any local, state, or federal laws or regulations be changed?

11) What will be the effect on existing local institutions that now provide the service? Must new institutions be created?

12) What specific steps must be taken to implement the service on cable television?

5. Finally, although not specifically a part of the responsibility of this study, a detailed study and recommendations must be undertaken to determine the appropriate role of the public library in utilizing cable television. Obviously there are a number of facts to consider:

a) The appropriateness of the public library as the location for citizen access and involving the inclusion of production facilities, studios, and broadcast facilities on site;

b) The services and programs of the library, which could appropriately be "packaged" for video distribution such as children's story-hours, puppet shows, adult discussion groups, and of course informational services;

c) Possibilities for local government access and input by citizens such as polling on a proposed highway or zoning decision;

d) Possibilities for further development of the library as a community catalyst by providing time to local drama groups, musical programs, and discussion of current issues.

It seems inevitable that we raise more questions than we supply answers. It seems appropriate at this time to wonder from what source we might continue the dialogue in order to see that flags raised by this report get some concerned governmental response.